



David Winfield

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David Winfield's career was inspired by a motorcycle ride in 1951. That summer he rode from Oxford to Istanbul, stopping to visit the painted churches of Serbia on the way, and spending two weeks walking between the monasteries of Mount Athos. This was his first encounter with the Byzantine world and its churches, and his desire to clean and preserve the paintings he saw set him on the path of becoming a conservator, working in Turkey, Cyprus, and later in the United Kingdom. He was studying for a degree in Modern History at Merton College, Oxford, and his life combined that historical training with the practical skills he learned in the churches in which he worked. David's abiding interest was in pragmatic issues, particularly in how painters made their paintings, and his decades spent on scaffolding gave him an unrivaled expertise on how artists worked. It was addressing these questions that led to his most important publications.

David Winfield was brought up in Hendon, northwest London, the son of a civil servant who had been wounded in World War I. His mother, Edith, died when he was only five, but his father's sisters helped to care for him; he spent his holidays with his mother's sisters at Sidmouth on the coast of Devon. He had one brother, Paul, who was six years older than him and trained as a bomber pilot in World War II. His plane was damaged during a raid but he managed to ground it safely in Holland; he and his crew then spent most of the war in prisoner of war camps. David attended Bryanston school, a relatively new boarding school at

Blandford in Dorset, which had been founded the year before he was born. Both David's father and his brother had died before he was thirty.

After graduating from Oxford in 1954, David moved to Belgrade University for two years at the recommendation of Gervase Mathew, through whom he was awarded a British Council Scholarship. While there he worked in Belgrade with the major Serbian art historians Svetozar Radojić and Vojislav Djurić. During his summers he trained in wall painting conservation techniques at the thirteenth-century monastery at Sopoćani. This was led by an Italian team that was in Serbia as part of a UN-sponsored program. His time in Yugoslavia produced his first publication on the art of the Byzantine world, a study of early images of the Nemanjić rulers of Serbia.¹

During these years David Winfield met David Talbot Rice, who had been harboring a desire to work in Trebizond (modern Trabzon) since his first visit there in 1929. Talbot Rice's wishes came true in 1959, when he finally secured a permit from the Turkish authorities to remove the whitewash from the church of Hagia Sophia, then still operating as a mosque. He approached David to undertake the work. Financed by the Russell Trust, the cleaning took place over the next five years. Hagia Sophia still functioned as a mosque, so work had to cease every Friday; but the authorities

1 D. Winfield, "Four Historical Compositions from the Medieval Kingdom of Serbia," *Byzantinoslavica* 19, no. 2 (1958): 251–78.

were willing for the work to take place as they were building a new mosque nearby. This freed the monument to be opened as a museum when the work was completed. Although much of the surface detail of the paintings had been lost over the centuries, the removal of the whitewash revealed some remarkable paintings, the best Byzantine imperial commission to survive from the thirteenth century.² David managed to persuade the Vali of Trabzon to open the site as a museum (and resisted his request to repaint the frescoes to make them more attractive), and the newly opened museum, surrounded by its English-style garden, became a major tourist attraction on the Turkish Black Sea coast.

In the 1950s Trabzon was a remote and sleepy town, cut off from the rest of Anatolia by the Pontos mountains, and Hagia Sophia lay just to the west of the town in what was still then a separate village. David, donning boater and blazer on festive days, was a well-known figure in the city. He attracted many Byzantinists and travelers to visit him, including Rose Macaulay and Freya Stark, whom he escorted through the city. Trebizond became the base for David Winfield and later his wife June for six months of the year.

It was during this work that David first met Anthony Bryer (on 19 August 1959, as they meticulously recorded), setting in train their joint interest in the history and monuments of the Pontos. At weekends over the next years they each traveled along the coast and up the valleys on to the *yaylas* recording all they could find of the Byzantine and Greek past of the region before it was lost. They effectively completed this work in 1976, but it appeared only a decade later as the two-volume *The Byzantine Monuments and Topography of the Pontos*, Dumbarton Oaks Studies 20 (Washington, D.C., 1985). The opening chapter on the topography of the region shows how far and wide David traveled, and how much he observed. It is as much a work of anthropology as of historical geography, noting what is grown and eaten where, such as his account of the *hamsi* (anchovy) season, and the cultural differences between the people of the coast and those of the inland valleys and *yaylas*. Further work in the region was undertaken by Selina Tomlinson and Michael Ballance (who later married), and much of this was incorporated in the Bryer and Winfield book. Their travels came just

2 D. Talbot Rice, ed., *The Church of Hagia Sophia at Trebizond* (Edinburgh, 1968).

before the modernization of the Pontos swept away many of the buildings, names, and memories which had been fading since the exchange of populations in 1923. Similar work could never be undertaken now.

Despite good relations with his local workers, working on a Christian monument was not always easy. Talbot Rice's permit also covered the Fatih and Yenicuma mosques in the city—the former cathedral of the Chrysocephalos and the church of St. Eugenios. David knew there were paintings and mosaics in both, but plans to work there had to be abandoned after David's workers warned him that it might inflame local sensitivities.

In 1963, when work at Hagia Sophia was completed, David was awarded a grant from the Marjory Wardrop Trust for Georgian studies at the University of Oxford (1963–65) to study the Georgian churches in the valleys around the river Çoruh to the east of Trabzon. These had been studied by Georgian scholars during the Russian occupation of the area in 1917, but had since been "lost" with the erection of the Iron Curtain. David's work on the sculptures in the churches was published in the *Journal of Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* in 1968.³ This reawoke interest in the churches—an endeavor that has now become an industry ever since access from Georgia became possible again after independence in 1991. Nevertheless, all scholars still rely on David's photographs and descriptions and the drawings made by June, particularly of the decorated column at Oshki, which has since been extensively vandalized.

The reputation that David earned during his work at Trabzon led to him being asked by Michael Gough to clean the paintings at Eski Gümus, a rock-cut complex near Niğde, conducted from 1962 to 1964. Preliminary reports on the church appeared in *Anatolian Studies*, but the final publication of the church and its paintings never appeared after Michael Gough's untimely death.⁴

At the end of that project, David was appointed Research Associate in Byzantine Archaeology at Dumbarton Oaks (effectively its Field Director). His work was primarily to be based in Istanbul, continuing the long tradition of work there started by Thomas

3 D. Winfield, "Some Early Medieval Figure Sculpture from North East Turkey," *JWarb* 31 (1968): 33–72.

4 M. Gough, "The Monastery of Eski Gümus: A Preliminary Report," *AnatSt* 14 (1964): 147–61; idem, "The Monastery of Eski Gümus: Second Preliminary Report," *AnatSt* 15 (1965): 157–64.

Whittemore's Byzantine Institute in the 1930s, which Dumbarton Oaks had taken over by 1963. He succeeded Ernest Hawkins in his position, but their relationship was not an easy one. However, he soon shifted his focus to Cyprus as work in Turkey became more difficult to organize.

The move to Cyprus proved to be the most fruitful of David's Byzantine career. The list of churches he worked on includes almost all the most important churches on the island. His major projects were the Panagia Phorbiotissa at Asinou (1965–67) and the Panagia Arakou at Lagoudhera (1968–73); he also worked on the churches of the Panagia Amasgou and St. George in Monagri (1969–70) and revisited the work that Ernest Hawkins had undertaken at Perachorio and the Enkleistra of St. Neophytos near Paphos (1969–71). He also studied the mosaics at Kiti and Lythrakomi, then still on the walls of the church.

David was always concerned for the welfare of Dumbarton Oaks' loyal workers, particularly Kostas Zaferiades and Joannis Makridis. He also welcomed visitors to his various houses in the Troodos, including the restored monastic buildings around Lagoudhera. With no telephone, the advice for emergencies was to ring the church bell to call help from the nearby village. David's three children—Nancy, Diana, and Edward—were all born in Nicosia hospital and spent their early years at Lagoudhera, taught to read by their mother in the morning and then playing with the foreman's family in the afternoon. David made wine in the monastery cellars, which their landlord, the redoubtable Bishop of Kyrenia, enjoyed tasting on his visits, and groceries were delivered in freezer boxes by the village bus from Nicosia.

The fruit of all David's work came in a series of books, pamphlets, and articles on the making of Byzantine art. In 1968 he published "Middle and Later Byzantine Wall Painting Methods," still a key article on the making of wall paintings.⁵ In 1982 he wrote with June the *Proportion and Structure of the Human Figure in Byzantine Wall-Painting and Mosaic*, an attempt to reconstruct the modular systems artists used to establish the proportions of the figures they painted.⁶

5 D. Winfield, "Middle and Later Byzantine Wall Painting Methods," *DOP* 22 (1968): 61–139.

6 D. Winfield and J. Winfield, *Proportion and Structure of the Human Figure in Byzantine Wall-Painting and Mosaic*, BAR International Series 154 (Oxford, 1982).

The book shows both their practical knowledge of the painting, and their ability to harness Byzantine texts to support their arguments. The publications of Hagia Sophia at Trebizon and Asinou both included chapters by David Winfield on the making of the paintings, but their fullest account came in the superbly documented publication of the paintings at Lagoudhera in 2003.⁷ The five years David and June Winfield spent on scaffolding inside the church cleaning its paintings allowed them to retrace the working practices of the artist in extraordinary detail. Their study allows us to follow the painter through from the plaster that he laid on the wall to the system of proportions that he used to lay out figures, and to his build-up of paint layers. They spotted the shortcuts he took, and the times he changed his mind: the cracks in the plaster he hurriedly smeared over leaving the evidence of thumb prints; the incised lines that marked out the preliminary drawing which he subtly modified in the final painting; the errors he painted over until a satisfactory result was achieved. If Cenino Cennini's *Craftsman's Handbook* of 1437 presents an ideal of medieval work practices, the Winfields recorded the reality. David's intimate knowledge of the churches enabled him to verify that the same artist had worked at both Lagoudhera and Neophytos' Enkleistra, when he recognized that the plaster had been made and handled in the same way at each site. David believed his greatest contribution was disentangling the complex layers of painting in the church at Asinou, which he published in *Asinou: A Guide* in 1969. Annemarie Weyl Carr has recently praised the "skeletal clarity" of his account.⁸

In 1983 Giles Constable called this the "Golden Age" of fieldwork at Dumbarton Oaks.⁹ But by the time that he wrote those words, it—like all Golden Ages—was in the past. The quantity of fieldwork funded by Dumbarton Oaks decreased greatly during the 1970s, and when the work at Lagoudhera came to an end in 1973, David moved back to England. He then began writing up his work, funded by a series of

7 D. Winfield and J. Winfield, *The Church of the Panagia tou Arakos at Lagoudhera, Cyprus: The Paintings and their Painterly Significance*, DOS 37 (Washington, DC, 2003).

8 A.W. Carr and A. Nicolaïdès, eds., *Asinou across Time: Studies in the Architecture and Murals of the Panagia Phorbiotissa, Cyprus*, DOS 43 (Washington, DC, 2012), 9.

9 G. Constable, "Dumbarton Oaks and Byzantine Field Work," *DOP* 37 (1983): 172.

short-term fellowships in Oxford, as Visiting Fellow at All Souls (1973) and then as Senior Research Fellow at Merton College, supplemented by grants from Dumbarton Oaks. In 1972 he was also invited to give the Rhind Lectures to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland in Edinburgh.

In 1979 David found new employment to make the most of his talents, as the founder and director of the Workshop for the Conservation of Wall Paintings at Canterbury Cathedral. He was responsible for the conservation of the ceiling paintings in the Jesus Chapel. While he was doing this work he was approached in 1981 by the National Trust to become their first Surveyor of Conservation. Over the next decade he was responsible for establishing the Conservation Service at the National Trust, in 1982 setting up the Cliveden conservation workshop for stone and plaster. He appointed freelance conservators as external advisers on maintenance and remedial treatment of metal, leather, stained glass, wall paintings, and other media. In 1984 he wrote the foreword to the National Trust's *Manual of Housekeeping*, a practical guide to the care of historic buildings and their contents.¹⁰ He proactively supported the Trust's loan of 190 items to the *Treasure Houses of Britain* exhibition at the National Gallery of Art in Washington in 1985–86.

In 1989 Uppark, a magnificent eighteenth-century house on the South Downs in West Sussex was badly damaged by fire, just months after David retired from the National Trust. The decision to restore it to its condition the day before the fire was made possible only because of the infrastructure built up by David over the previous decade and the belief he had instilled in the organization about the capabilities and skills of the conservators they now employed. He championed the use of lime instead of cement (based on his experience of slaking lime in his own lime pit at Asinou), and was alert to new technologies from other areas: he took over the use of buffered sodium silicate for the raising of protective alkalinity in concrete from the repair of motorway bridges and applied it to the concrete statuary at Mount Stewart in Northern Ireland. He also advocated the use of radar and ultrasonic investigation for the diagnosis of corroding metal in historic buildings. He commissioned a government-funded survey of energy-saving measures for historic heating systems,

precursor to the Trust's development of "conservation heating."¹¹

It was David who made the National Trust take the conservation of their historic properties seriously. He described his philosophy in the 1991 edition of the *Manual of Housekeeping*:

As the now retired Surveyor of Conservation for the National Trust, I can say that one lesson learned from my years with the National Trust is that long-term preservation is not a natural activity. As human beings our thoughts tend to stay within the life-cycle of birth, maturity, decline and death. We do not want to think beyond our own lifetimes, and much of the present popular interest in the conservation of our heritage is in fact concerned with the present-day enjoyment of it rather than the restrictions demanded by long-term preservation. An additional problem is that modern life and modern products are concerned with speed and ease of use, whereas good conservation demands slow and patient work and it is always labour intensive. The Bible itself takes a gloomy view of conservation as, for example, Matthew vi, 19: *Lay up not for yourselves treasures upon earth, Where moth and dust doth corrupt, And where thieves break through and steal... .* These are some of the reasons why conservation measures need to be continually thought about rather than treated as actions that can be completed and then forgotten about.

Those thoughts are as relevant to the paintings in the Byzantine churches he worked on as the treasures in the care of the National Trust.

When David and June "retired," they moved to the Isle of Mull, where they bought a farm at the north end of the island. In an echo of the disaster at Uppark, a workman accidentally set fire to the bothy (small estate building) in which they had stored the library, notes, and photographs of all their work over the past fifty years. The loss was terrible, but David and June

¹⁰ Compiled by Hermione Sandwith and Sheila Stainton.

¹¹ S. Staniforth, B. Hayes, and L. Bullock, "Appropriate Technologies for Relative Humidity Control for Museum Collections Housed in Historic Buildings," in *Preventive Conservation: Practice, Theory and Research. Preprints of the Contributions to the Ottawa Congress, 12–16 September 1994* (London, 1994), 123–28.

persevered to resurrect their studies from what had survived and from their memories. Fortunately, copies of many of their photographs had been deposited in the Conway Library at the Courtauld Institute of Art and at Dumbarton Oaks. It was during these years (when they weren't looking after their sheep or visitors to their holiday cottage) that he and June succeeded in writing up their work on Cyprus, resulting in the monograph on Lagoudhera, and a chapter on the narthex painting of St. George in the recent publication on Asinou. He still has work forthcoming, not least *La Maniera Greca*, a monograph on the influence of Byzantine craftsmen on the early Italian Renaissance, due out in 2014.

David continued to travel down from Mull to the Courtauld Institute to lecture students in the Department of Wall Paintings Conservation on his work, although he was only too aware of how much the science of wall painting conservation had moved on from the 1950s. He also left the department a small collection of fallen fragments of painted plaster he had collected early in his career, which have proved an invaluable resource for analysis among students. He continued to welcome friends and students to his house on Mull.

David's work was recognized in 1974, when he was awarded an MBE for services to conservation.

Although this is an obituary of David Winfield, any account of his life and work must recognize the role played by his wife, June (née Wainwright). They met when she came out to Trebizond as a draftswoman and

she accompanied him in all his subsequent work. June made careful drawings at all the sites, many of which have been published in their works.

Early in 2013 David was still well informed about the Byzantine world, when rumors first emerged that there were plans to reopen Hagia Sophia in Trabzon as a mosque once more. The Turkish government carried the conversion out in July, shortly before David's death. The paintings that David so carefully conserved are now hidden behind a tent structure built within the church, and the wonderful floor covered by a permanently fitted carpet.

David Winfield was fortunate to be able to work in Turkey and Cyprus when there was funding available and governments willing to support the opening up and conservation of their Byzantine monuments. He rewarded those that trusted him with their monuments with his meticulous and careful work. The appearance of the Asinou volume in 2012 means that publications now exist for all the churches on which he had worked. He will always be associated with the paintings he worked on, and will be remembered as a modest, courteous, and supportive friend and colleague.

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